

Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2017 – REVIEW Robin Ince's Rorschach Test*****

“Anger is easy, joy can be more difficult” says Robin Ince at his new Edinburgh Fringe show ‘Robin Ince’s Rorschach Test’.

“There’s so much anger in the world, particularly on social media, newspapers and in politics.” Happily, this show provides the antidote to the haters and the cynics with healthy doses of laughter and optimism. Ince remind us of all the joy there is in the world, and how much of that joy can be found in art.

☒ You may know Ince as the self-styled idiot of science, on his Rose d’Or winning Radio 4 show “The Infinite Monkey Cage” Here he takes the same refreshingly honest approach to Art, a subject which to many is as obscure and frightening as quantum mechanics.

With characteristic comedic candour, he acknowledges that he is not an expert, but has decided that should not prevent him, and us, appreciating and loving the art around us. His self-deprecating style raises lots of laughs, and sets the tone early on. This is not an art show to lecture, instead Ince uses laughter and enthusiasm to help share the art he loves. He reminds us that the smallest provincial gallery will always include some treasure to be found, and to take those opportunities to seek them out. With silly voices and hilarious anecdotes, he challenges and encourages us to find our favourites.

He rejects the self-consciousness that many of us feel when approaching works of Art. “What if I don’t understand it? What if I stare at the painting too long, or not long enough? Will the attendant judge me?” He acknowledges our fears and

satirises the self-important art experts who wander about galleries muttering smugly. He encourages us to engage honestly with the art we encounter, whether we love it or hate it. In art, as in life, the importance of being honest is key.

Ince shares slides of his favourite paintings, and provides back stories and anecdotes about them. He relays conversations overheard in galleries that "could be an Allan Bennet play", and mocks those who take art, and themselves, too seriously.

Ince shares a visit to a kinetic sculpture. In its hermetically sealed gallery it remained completely still, losing the kinetic element entirely. Ince describes two old ladies taking subversive direct action to make the sculpture move, so that they could enjoy it as the artist intended. This delightful lack of reverence for the hushed gallery encourages us to genuinely interact and respond to the art we see, and not worry so much about whether we are expert or not.

Is it spoken word? Is it comedy? Well, it's both. The audience is both entertained and informed. Ince combines brilliant intelligence with a capacity for celebrating the idiotic and absurd that is unfailingly funny.

Some of the slides don't have back stories, but are included just because "they feature knitting, and they are lovely" Some images are beautiful, some are scary, some may be melancholy until they have Robin Ince making trouser jokes about them. Perennial favourites Georgia O'Keefe and Stanley Spencer are energetically celebrated.

Ince explains that one of his favourite artists challenged the popular misconception that contemporary art often comes from pain and misery. Slides of bubbling mud and messy, joyful combines are crowned by the world's best collage. He reminds us that Rauschenberg said, "Why can't art come from Joy?" "Sometimes great art doesn't need to be a metaphor for anything." "Sometimes it's just a goat in a tyre."

Of course, this being a Robin Ince show, there are far too many slides, far too many paintings, and far too many funny anecdotes to fit into an hour-long show. This means that all this joy and hilarity is delivered at top speed, and not everything in his head will make it on to the show. The advantage of this is that you could go three nights in a row and have a new and fascinating show each night. (The disadvantage is that you're going to want to visit a lot of galleries.)

In a world that often seems filled with anger, intolerance and division this effervescent, funny show reminds us of the great joy to be had in art, if we only stop to look.

“Starting the day with hateful newspapers and social media, no wonder we feel bleak. He advises “Don't read newspapers in the morning; instead read poems or look at your favourite pictures. You will have taken in more of the wonders of humanity than will be found in any newspaper”.

Good advice. I feel more joyful already.

[Robin Ince's Rorschach Test](#) is at Gilded Balloon at the Museum from now until 13 August 13.30

Also at The Stand Comedy Club with “Pragmatic Insanity” from now until 13 August 18.20